

Telephone interview with CAPT Edgar T. Steward, MSC, USN (Ret.) Former hospital corpsman during World War II. Conducted by Jan K. Herman, Historian of the Navy Medical Department, 8 November 2004.

Where were you born?

I was born in Taylor County, Iowa. I was the first born of my mother and father on August 3rd, 1921.

Where did you go to school?

My elementary school was in Clearfield, Iowa. My family moved to Jackson, Minnesota in 1937, and I finished my 2 years in Jackson High School.

When did you join the Navy?

I joined on March 21st, 1942.

What prompted you to do that?

I wanted to escape the draft. I was low number on the Selective Service listing and I did not want to go to the Army. In fact, I'd asked my father to sign papers for me after I graduated from high school. But he would not do it. So I worked in a grocery store and a meat market for a year or so before I went to the university. When the draft came along, he was convinced that I should go ahead and do that. So he signed my papers. I was under 21 at the time. That's how I got into the Navy.

Where did you go to boot camp?

At Great Lakes, Illinois.

How long was boot camp at that time?

I had an unusual time in boot camp. I tried out for the Bluejacket's Choir at the Great Lakes Training Center and was accepted. We had special training. We made trips around through the northern part of Indiana and parts of Illinois. We visited Notre Dame and some of the other places. We did a weekly radio show called "Meet Your Navy." As a member of the choir, I got to go along. So, my boot camp was 34 days altogether. I had to leave because I was in sick bay. I got what they called the old "cat fever," what we call influenza today.

So you had to leave the choir.

Yes. And then I went to an outgoing unit and was transferred to a school. I missed making application to hospital corps school. So they sent me down to Texas A&M College for elementary Electricity and Radio Materiel School. It was a precursor for radar. At that time, radar was just getting started.

Had you wanted to be a corpsman?

Yes. When I was at the University of Minnesota before I joined the Navy, I worked as an orderly at the University of Minnesota hospitals. So I was interested in doing that.

So here you were learning how to fix radar sets.

Yes. But when they tried to introduce me to algebraic equations, they lost me completely. I flunked out.

How, then, did you become a corpsman?

After I flunked out of the school at Texas A&M College, I went to New Orleans for about a month at the receiving station in Algiers, then was sent to San Diego to the amphibious forces as a seaman second class. I was striking for a coxswain at that time. I saw that corpsman sitting over there on the dock reading comic books and relaxing in a pile of life jackets and I was out there getting wet in those LCVs. So I put in a letter to the Bureau. I said, "Dear Bureau, I want to go to corps school.

This was BUMED?

Yes or maybe BUPERS, whoever did it. I think BUMED was assigning corpsmen at that time. In May of 1943 I went to hospital corps school at San Diego in Balboa Park.

What do you remember about corps school?

We were taught first aid, how to make beds, and all the ward duties. We learned to give shots and take blood. We were taught field sanitation, learned all about anatomy and physiology. In fact, I still have my 1939 copy of the *Handbook of the Hospital Corps*. It's still a pretty good document.

How long was the course?

I think it was about 6 weeks.

After you graduated, what was your next assignment?

I stayed at the Naval Hospital there at San Diego and worked on the wards. I took care of patients who had been evacuated back to the states from the battles in the Pacific. The wards were in buildings of Balboa Park which had been taken over by the Navy.

How long were you doing that before you ended up going there yourself?

I spent until May of '44. Then I was sent down to Camp Pendleton for duty with the FMF. I was a third class petty officer at that time--a pharmacist's mate 3rd class.

What was it like going from the Navy to the Marine Corps?

The first thing they did was take away my Navy uniform and sea bag and give me Marine uniforms after I reported to the 5th Marine Division. It was in Field Med School that I was assigned to the 5th Marine Division--Co. C of the 5th Medical Battalion. That was in May '44. In June, of course, D-Day happened. We were training at that time to get ready to go overseas.

What was the training?

We had field exercises. We'd go out in the field and support a battalion or a regiment and set up a little hospital. I got involved in working the operating room. The senior corpsman was an operating room tech. The doctor was William Jordan Holloway. He was a lieutenant, Medical Corps, Naval Reserve. He took much interest in our surgical capabilities. I became a second class pharmacist's mate while we were still at Camp Pendleton.

In September of 1944 we moved over to Camp Tarawa on the Big Island of Hawaii. There we set up a camp and continued our training--marching and setting up units and preparing

orthopedic instrument packs and so forth for our surgery. We knew we were going somewhere but didn't know where.

When did you find out where you were going?

We didn't find out until we were aboard the ship. We boarded the ships in January of 1945. Actually, it was late December. Our unit went aboard the USS *Talladega* (APA-208). We got underway and while we were underway heading west we learned that we were going to do the operation at Iwo Jima.

You probably had never heard of Iwo Jima.

I had no idea what it was. We were told that it had been bombed for 30 days so it should be softened up. It should be about a 72-hour operation. It turned out to be over a month.

Were you still on the *Talladega* when the landings occurred?

I stayed on the *Talladega* with the surgical unit for about 3 days. We were receiving casualties. Some of them were ambulatory and we could take care of them in the ward room and in the sick bay aboard the ship. If things got too heavy, we transferred them over to one of the hospital ships in the area.

So you didn't go ashore immediately.

We did not go ashore on D-Day.

When you arrived off Iwo Jima, did you go up on deck and look around?

You couldn't see too much except our aircraft strafing and the naval gunfire bombarding the shore. It was rainy and cloudy most of the time. But we were so busy with casualties shortly after D-Day that we didn't get to see much during the daylight hours. And, of course, we tried to get a little sleep at night when the casualties couldn't make it out to the ship.

I didn't see much until the morning they raised the flag. Someone said, "Hey, they raised the flag on Suribachi."

Could you see it?

I saw the first flag that had been put up. We went out on deck early that morning and it was flying up there. We were happy about that. We thought everything was all secured so we could go home pretty soon.

Well you were in for a surprise.

Yes we were. On D plus 4 or 5, they fed us a good breakfast of steak and eggs and about 3 o'clock in the morning we boarded a landing craft. We orbited around for a while, I got sick and lost my breakfast and also lost my helmet at the same time. So I went ashore with an empty stomach and no head cover.

When you got sick, that's when you lost your helmet.

I hadn't buckled my chin strap.

Was it an LVT or a LCVP?

An LCVP like the one I was going to drive when I was in training with the amphibious forces at Fort Ord, California.

This was D plus 5. What was going through your mind at that time? Can you remember?

No. I don't remember any particular feeling of fear. My concern was that I had lost my helmet. I needed something to protect my head. And that was my main goal when I got ashore and went with the unit. I had a young Marine PFC there right along me. He was my rifleman and took care of me.

We had to go in and dig fox holes immediately. And that was a difficult job. You could lay down, start kicking, and you could sink yourself into that ash. We finally found a helmet that was not being used.

Did you have a sidearm--a .45?

Yes. I carried a .45 all wrapped up in plastic. I never unsheathed the thing.

So it wasn't doing you much good except weighing you down.

That's right. I relied on that Marine who had been assigned to be my so-called body guard initially. Then, when we got into the hospital setup, he went back to work as a driver or stretcher bearer. I don't recall seeing him after we got the hospital set up.

What kind of equipment did you have when you went ashore?

We had a small field marching pack and a blanket roll with a change of socks and some underwear and our toilet gear. We had a cartridge belt with water and a first aid kit. I carried a corpsman's first aid kit which was called a Unit 1. I had a gas mask. We found out that that was a very valuable thing not to have so we threw the gas mask away and I used the bag as a first aid kit rather than use the military issue aid kit. The Japanese were always looking for signs of people carrying different gear or things that the usual Marine did not have. So we tried to look as much Marine as we could.

So you took what was in your Unit 1 and put it into the gas mask pouch.

That's right.

What was in the Unit 1 at that time?

We had the compress battle dressings, gauze, adhesive tape. We had a little instrument set for hemostats, scissors, and forceps. We had morphine syrettes.

Do you recall how many syrettes there were?

I think there was a package of five, something like that. We also had some wire splinting material and packages of sulfa powder--sulfanilamide or sulfadiazine. And that was about all we had. We tried to use the Marine's first aid kit which he had on his belt, which was a battle dressing and a sulfa pack.

After I got up with the division hospital, which we set up near Airfield Number 1, we had dry penicillin, which we had to reconstitute with water. That's the first time I had seen penicillin in my career.

Did you have serum albumin?

Yes. We did have some serum albumin. They also had some corpsmen up in the front lines with the company aid and battalion aid stations and they had serum albumin. About 10 days into the operation, we were able to get supplies of whole blood. They would drop it in by air.

Did you notice a difference in administering whole blood as far as results?

No, I didn't because I worked at nights in the surgery. I'd go over there at 7 o'clock in the evening and work until 7 o'clock in the morning. I'd meet the surgeon who I was assigned to work with during the night. We'd go to the receiving tent and look at the patients we wanted to take care of. Our surgeons would then pick out the patients we would work on that night. So I worked at night and tried to sleep in the fox hole during the day.

Tell me again the name of this little hospital?

It was the 5th Marine Division hospital.

What did it look like?

It was all tents except for the operating room which was a 16-foot by 16-foot paneled pre-fab hut. That was where our surgery was. The wards were big general purpose tents. The office were in pyramid tents. The wards had folding, wooden cots with canvas. The receiving area was a big fly tent, open on all sides. They'd bring the casualties in underneath that and line them up. The doctors would triage and sort them out. Then the surgeons would go in and have them carried over to the surgery and we'd start to work.

You were doing emergency surgery at this point.

It was life-saving and stabilization. A lot of the cases we got at night were belly wounds and some minor things. We didn't have flak gear at that time or armor. So we had a lot of belly wounds and facial wounds. We had a lot of wounds along the trunk and the legs. So we were working general surgery like a MASH unit to stabilize these people and get them evacuated. We held back on the minor surgery because that could be done later on, if it was possible to get the man back to duty.

When they were evacuated there were a couple of choices. There were some air evacuations, I know.

I don't recall when the first air evacuation took place. We were mostly evacuating to the beach. The shore party folks sent boats out to the APAs or the hospital ship that was out there.

Did you see the hospital ship?

I can't recall seeing it but I knew it was the *Comfort* [AH-6]. The APAs and the AKAs were doing a lot of casualty receiving out there.

While you were working in the hospital there, were you still taking incoming fire?

No. We were not taking incoming fire. The so-called front lines had moved pretty well away from us and were heading up into the northern part of the island. Suribachi had been pretty well secured by that time. They made us bivouac at the eastern side of the airfield and we'd have

to walk across the airfield to go to the division hospital where we were assigned. We were not bivouacked in the same area as the hospital.

But you ended up sleeping in a fox hole during the day.

Yes indeed.

So it must have been difficult just to maintain your own personal hygiene.

It was very difficult until later on when we were able to set up a shower unit in the division hospital area. That was about 25 days later.

How long were you at Iwo Jima?

We loaded out on March 26th, I believe it was, and headed back toward Hawaii.

Did you go back to Camp Tarawa again?

Yes. We spent two Easters because we crossed the International Date Line on Easter. I think that was on the 1st of April that year. It was about the time of the first landing on Okinawa.

So Iwo was really your last fight, then. Did you go to Okinawa?

No. I didn't go to Okinawa. Our division went back to lick our wounds and refit. We were scheduled to make the landings on the mainland of Japan.

I would imagine that your feelings about that possibility, having seen Iwo Jima, were not too positive.

We didn't know at that time. It was after the surrender on the *Missouri* that we learned that we had been pegged to be part of the landing on the island of Honshu.

The bomb put an end to all that.

Yes.

Do you remember hearing about the atomic bomb?

Yes. The guy I worked with in surgery, a second class pharmacist's mate named Phil Zafuto from New Kensington, Pennsylvania . . . He and I were on liberty down in Hilo in August of that year. We heard it on the radio--about the bomb at Hiroshima.

That's the one they dropped on my birthday, the day I was born.

August the 6th. Well, happy birthday.

Then you came back to the States after that?

No. We got reformed, boarded the ships in early September, shortly after the surrender, and headed for Japan. We went for occupation duty to the southern island of Kyushu. We went into Sasebo. We formed our unit and got aboard a train and moved the medical company down to Fukuoka. We were supporting the 28th Regiment. We set up a dispensary on an airfield in the little town of Shimonoseki. We took care of the hospital needs of the young troops as well as some of the natives there. We had several births in the hospital. We had the usual

appendectomies and tonsillectomies that kept the surgeons busy. That's what we did in the occupation.

Did you see a lot of war damage?

When we got off the ship in Sasebo, we formed up in a marching unit and marched up to the old Japanese naval base there. The stench was quite obvious. There was a lot of damage there. There was nobody on the streets to speak of. Those that we saw--the natives--would not look at us. They'd turn their backs. We were the conquerors and they didn't want to look at us. That was about a 2-mile hike from the port up to that base.

That base had a couple of ships that had been put there after the Russo-Japanese War. We didn't have much to do there. We were waiting to see what assignment we would get.

But once you got there, you say you took care of the troops and some of the locals.

That's right. Our commanding officer was a surgeon and he became quite well known and accepted in the little village there. When he went into the village, they'd bring out an old easy chair and let him sit down. He was a bit of an alcoholic and they'd serve him beer.

How long were you in Japan?

We left in December of '45. They relocated the 5th Division back to Camp Pendleton. We got there just before Christmas of 1945.

What was your assignment after that?

I went to Waco, Texas and married my girlfriend. We then went up to Minneapolis to the naval air station (in Minnesota) and there I got orders to go to independent duty school at Naval Hospital Portsmouth, Virginia.

So you had decided to make the Navy a career.

I was on a 6-year enlistment. I had enlisted in '42. I still had about 2 or 3 years yet to do. My enlistment was up in 1948. I was a second class petty officer by that time.

What did they teach you in independent duty school?

They taught us advanced medical work in order to be independent duty corpsmen to go aboard ships that didn't have a medical officer. They taught us some minor surgical procedures like tracheotomies. Being a lone corpsman on a ship, you had to be the doctor.

Did you get an assignment aboard ship?

No, I didn't. I stayed at the naval hospital. In fact, I was moved over to NOB [Naval Operating Base] hospital where the CINCLANTFLT headquarters is. I was there from '46 to '47. Jean and I lived in Ben Moreel* Housing right at the back gate of the Naval Hospital.

What was your assignment after that?

I made first class petty officer on the MAA Force while I was at NOB Hospital. I was then sent in 1947 to the ammunition depot at St. Julian's Creek in Portsmouth. We had a dispensary there mostly doing safety checks and taking care of the civilian population and the

*ADM Ben Moreel was the organizer of the Seabees.

Marine detachment. There was a chief petty officer, myself, as the next ranking petty officer, and we had two lower ranking hospital corpsmen. It was part of the dispensary for the Naval Shipyard at Portsmouth.

I stayed there until December of '47, when I was moved over to the receiving station at NOB Norfolk and was discharged from the Navy at that time. Jean and I then moved right back to Texas. We had a young baby at the time. Dave was born at Norfolk while we were there.

I thought I could get civilian employment. I tried and tried for about 30 days before I went down to the naval hospital at Houston and reenlisted.

What did they bring you back as?

A first class petty officer. I didn't lose rank because I reenlisted before 30 days were over.

Where did they send you for an assignment?

After I stayed in Houston for a while working on the ward, they sent me to Dublin, Georgia, where we had a naval hospital. I worked on wards over there as a first class and also worked the pharmacy. It was turned over to the Veterans Administration while I was there. Following that, I was sent up to Naval Hospital Charleston, South Carolina.

Were you at Charleston when the Korean War broke out?

No. I spent 2 years at Charleston and in March of 1950 I was ordered to the USS *Consolation* [AH-15]. When I reported up to Norfolk to go aboard the ship, it was on a cruise for Memorial Day in Boston. I waited at the receiving station until she came back, then went aboard. We were going to do an open house visit in New York City for July 4th. We went to New York but the Korean thing had started so security was clamped down. We had no visitors so we had 2 or 3 good days of liberty in New York before we went back to Norfolk and starting loading potatoes aboard the ship.

Potatoes?

Yes. They were loading all sorts of food stores and they brought in truck loads of food to stash away. We got no medical supplies to my knowledge at that time until we got through the Panama Canal and took on medical supplies at Oakland and more people.

The war had already been going on for about a month or so.

Yes. We didn't get to Korea until late August of 1950. The only hospital ship at that time was the Danish hospital ship *Jutlandia*. I think there was also a British hospital ship there at the time, the *Maine*. We pulled into Pusan sometime in August of 1950.

Do you recall what you saw at Pusan when you got there?

Yes. We tied up to a pier in Pusan and we had truckloads of patients and trainloads of patients coming onto the dock. We had our people out there doing triage. We filled up and then headed over to Yokosuka about every other day. Well, maybe it wasn't that often. We'd load patients at Pusan and get underway. That was an overnight trip. We'd go to Yokohama first to off-load the Army and Air Force patients, then we'd go down to Yokosuka and offload the Navy and Marine patients into the hospital there. We'd have an overnight liberty and then get underway and go back to Pusan. I don't recall the number of trips we made. It was during the Pusan Perimeter fighting at that time so we made quite a few trips because air evacuation was

hard to do at that time. Of course, we were expecting the *Benevolence* [AH-13] to come and assist us but she sank in an accident and they had to bring the *Haven* [AH-12] out of mothballs. We had a job to do there for quite a while.

What was your job on the ship?

I was a first class when I first went aboard. I worked in the hospital personnel division. We assigned corpsmen to their various work duties. We had a Medical Service Corps officer who worked with us. We also helped out with triage when we had many casualties coming aboard. We helped the doctors tag them.

How long did you stay aboard the ship?

I made chief petty officer while aboard and was assigned as the division chief for H Division and still worked in hospital staff personnel under the direction of the hospital personnel officer. In '51 we put the helicopter landing platform on the stern at the shipyard at San Pedro. When we got back in '52 for drydock to be refitted, that's when I got orders to Great Lakes to instructor's school.

Were you there when they put the helo deck aboard?

It was in the yard but we were aboard the ship while they did the work. It was a construction zone, so we were pretty restricted about going back there. We could see them taking off the old boat davits and making a place for the helicopter deck.

Were you on the ship when Dr. [Joel] Boone came aboard earlier?

Yes. We didn't have the helo deck there when he came aboard. He was lowered down by cable in a chair or sling or something. He was lowered down on the after end of the ship where there was more room on the fantail.

Did you see all that happen?

No. Normally, people came aboard by boat and up the gangway.

Did you see him once he was aboard?

Yes we did. He was a very dapper man with a handlebar mustache. I was impressed because he had a Medal of Honor and the ribbon was on his uniform. He was a very small man, but confident and casual. Admirals were untouchable, as far as we were concerned. We didn't render any special honors as I recall. When the Secretary of the Navy came aboard, we had to line the rail of the ship. But we didn't do that for Admiral Boone.

What did you do after instructor's school at Great Lakes?

I reported to corps school there as an instructor.

What kind of instructor were you going to be?

I was a company commander. I was the commander of a platoon of corpsmen, both male and female, who were going through the hospital corps school. Of course, I was teaching first aid and minor surgery and field sanitation as well as military duties. I was commissioned in October of '52, and continued on with this class as an ensign. When they graduated, I went to the naval hospital and reported for duty as an intern in the various administrative departments of

the hospital. I started out in patient personnel, then moved on to supply and finance. I also served on court martials as a trial or defense counsel.

This was a complete switch. Here you were the highest rank in the enlisted community as a chief. Now you were starting on the bottom rung of the officer corps. How did you feel about all that?

I was pleased as can be that I could get an appointment as a commissioned officer. That had been one of my goals. I had taken the exam with the hope that I could achieve that goal and I did it.

What was your assignment after that?

I finished my 6-month internship period. In 1953 I was ordered to go to the school of justice at Newport, Rhode Island. Then I was supposed to go to Fort McClellan, Alabama for NBC school--Nuclear, Biological, Chemical warfare school. Then I was supposed to go to Bethesda, Maryland to the School of Hospital Administration. Well, I finished the school at Newport and got a change of orders. They sent me to Portsmouth and I relieved Johnny [Wheeler B.] Lipes. He was the aide to Admiral Cook, who was the commander of Naval Hospital Portsmouth.

That must have been quite a change from what you had been doing in the past.

It was. One thing about the Medical Department or the Hospital Corps of our Navy. We were jacks of all trades. We did our own yeoman work, our own motor transport work, and all the other stuff that had very little relationship to medical, but we did it.

So, being an aide, you had to keep the admiral's schedule, etc.

Yes. It was a difficult job. I got relieved by a full lieutenant who came aboard. So I moved over to military personnel at the naval hospital in June of '54. Then I went up to Bethesda to the School of Hospital Administration.

What was your assignment there?

I was under instruction to learn medical administration. After a year there, I went down to Quantico where I was chief of patient personnel and military personnel at the naval hospital. I was a lieutenant, j.g. while I was there.

How long were you at Quantico?

From '55 through '58. In late '58 I was sent to the Marine Corps base to attend the amphibious warfare school junior course. I was one of the pioneer Medical Service Corps officers going through that particular course. The Medical Department had finally understood that it was essential that they have good hospital corpsmen and good medical officer support in the Marine Corps. CAPT George Donabedian, MC, USN, who was on staff at the Marine Corps schools at Quantico as the senior medical advisor, took a liking to me and he sent me to that school.

Where did they send you after your training?

I went to the 2nd Medical Battalion of the 2nd Marine Division at Camp Lejeune. My family moved there and I was assigned as company commander of Company C, 2nd Medical

Battalion, 2nd Marine Division. I had a company of young hospital corpsmen and Marines. We were supporting the 2nd Marine Division.

Did you deploy anywhere?

We went as companies or portions of companies to the Mediterranean with the BLTs (Battalion Landing Teams). It was a battalion of Marines plus a squadron of air. I didn't go on a Mediterranean cruise. The officer who relieved me made that cruise and I was moved up as the executive officer of the medical battalion. At that time they were keeping medical officers--physicians that is--pretty much in a medical situation and letting the MSCs do the work of administering the hospital. We had a commanding officer who was a physician and so I was his executive officer.

Were you there when the Marines landed in Beirut?

No. But I was involved in the Bay of Pigs in 1961.

What do you recall about that? That was in '61.

They had ordered a special reinforced medical company to be put together and sent to Homestead Air Force Base in Florida. CAPT Cunningham, a surgeon, was CO of the medical battalion. He was designated as the commanding officer of this special medical company. It included interpreters and translators who could understand Spanish. I was appointed by the CG of the 2nd Marine Division as commanding officer of the medical battalion for a brief period of time. We were to go into operation if the invasion succeeded.

I guess you didn't have to worry about that.

No. They came home in about 10 days.

Didn't you end up with some Vietnam experience?

I went from Camp Lejeune to Kaneohe, Hawaii in 1962. I served as the medical administrative officer of the 1st Marine Brigade. It was composed of the 4th Regiment of the 3rd Marine Division. I had made lieutenant commander and worked there with the Brigade for 3 years. We did training and field operations. In 1965 we started planning for an operation called "Silver Lance." That was to send the Brigade on an amphibious operation to land at Camp Pendleton. So we called in hospital corpsmen, dental techs, and doctors to get our unit up to date to make that landing.

They boarded the ships out of Pearl Harbor. Silver Lance turned into "Purple Shaft" when they turned west and headed to Vietnam.

So, you never got to the West Coast.

I was not aboard the ship. I was back with the women and kids. The brigade surgeon, I, and the staff were still back in Kaneohe so we made sure the families got transferred back to the States. Lt. General [Victor] Krulak was commander of FMFPAC. He was very helpful and we got the families moved out. Then I got orders to go to Field Med School in Camp Pendleton as the executive officer there in 1965.

Things were already getting pretty hot over in Vietnam so you were responsible for training the corpsmen who would go.

That's right. We had classes in excess of 200 people coming through. It included the hospital corpsmen, Medical Service Corps officers, medical officers, Chaplain Corps officers, dental officers. We were training all kinds of personnel there. Each class ran about 5 or 6 weeks. Some of them would overlap. We'd start one class in and they'd bring some more in. Our staff was very good. We had a good group of officers and enlisted instructors.

Where did you get our instructors? Were a lot of these folks Vietnam vets?

Yes. A lot were from World War II and Korea at that time. We had a master chief and several senior chiefs. We also had a lot of good first class petty officers who were instructors. Some had been with the Marine Corps most of their career.

You had a tall order at that time. You needed a lot of corpsmen, physicians, and MSCs to go to Vietnam. How did the training reflect the need?

We finally convinced BUMED that we needed to get people trained as FMF corpsmen even if they weren't going directly to the FMF. Also we needed to get trained the young kids just out of corps school so they would have a pool of people. So we were getting fresh kids right out of corps school as well as people who were going to the fleet.

What was the curriculum?

It was advanced first aid. The corpsmen had already had boot camp training. Our main goal was to teach them to survive in the field--to act under fire in a combat situation with a Marine unit.

Did you go to Vietnam yourself?

Yes. But I didn't go until 1969. I was exec at the Field Med School at Camp Pendleton from '65 to '67. Then I was exec at Camp Lejeune from '67 to '69. The reason they sent me there was because I had developed a curriculum at Pendleton they wanted at Lejeune so everyone would be trained the same way. I made commander while I was at Lejeune. In '69 I got orders to the 3rd Marine Division and went to Vietnam.

I guess, having been training folks for Vietnam all that time, your mind set was going in that direction. What do you recall about going?

I left from Wilmington, North Carolina on an aircraft and flew to Los Angeles. Then I went to the Air Force Base near San Francisco--Travis. From there I went to Honolulu, where I spent 5 days in orientation and getting briefed as to what was going on with FMFPAC medical people. From there I flew on to Danang and was transported up to Quang Tri where Division Headquarters was. That was early June of 1969. In October the Division was ordered to return to Okinawa and I was ordered down to Danang to become the medical admin officer with the Third Marine Amphibious Force under Lt. General H. Nickerson. I stayed there until March of 1970. At that time we were told that the Army was going to take over so we wrote a new table of organization and I wrote myself out of a job and got an early return to the States.

Were you ready to retire at that point?

No. I was a commander then. I got orders to the NOB dispensary at Norfolk, Virginia. I was executive assistant there under the senior medical officer. (CAPT Helgerson, MC) In 1971, RADM [Joseph] Yon, who was the commander of the Naval Hospital Portsmouth, pulled me out

of that job at the NOB dispensary to be his assistant director of support services for the Naval Regional Medical Center. So I worked with him and later on with Dr. [Willard] Arentzen setting up the dispensary and working up the regional concept that included Williamsburg, Jamestown, Oceana, and all the dispensaries in the Tidewater area.

Arentzen, who was still a captain at that time, came down and took over as director of medical services. So he and I worked pretty closely together. Then he put on his star in late '72.

In '73, I was ordered over to FMFLANT as the medical admin officer there. a commander Medical Corps was the Fleet Surgeon for FMFLANT. He failed selection for captain and they moved him out. I picked up captain at that time and they kept me on staff. They did not replace the doctor. I became the staff medical representative for FMFLANT.

Was that your last assignment?

No. In 1976 I got orders to Headquarters Marine Corps and was the medical admin under Dr. [Donald] Hauler and worked also on the Marine Corps IG team. When I reported there in '76, Al Schwab was the Director of the Medical Service Corps at BUMED. When I reported in for duty, I turned in a letter requesting retirement 1 year from that date. While I was there, VADM Arentzen called and said, "What could I do to have you stay on active duty?"

I said, "You could give me command down at the Field Med School at Camp Lejeune."

He said, "Do you know anyone who wants to go out to Hawaii?"

I said, "Yes. The CO down at Camp Lejeune."

He replied, "If I give you Camp Lejeune, will you pull your papers back?"

I said, "Sure."

So we made a deal and I came to Camp Lejeune in '77 and took command of the Field Medical Service School and while I was there it was a great time to work.

In '79 I could see the handwriting on the wall. They were going to send me back to the Bureau or somewhere in Washington so I made application here for civilian employment as the Onslow County Health Director. Lo and behold, I was accepted in September of '79. I wrote up my request for retirement, walked it through, and retired on January 1, 1980.

How long were you in that job?

Until September of 1983, when I became eligible to draw Social Security.

What have you done since then?

I failed retirement three times. I was the administrator of a volunteer hospice organization that was organized in Onslow County, NC. I was able to prepare the organizational procedures and get the organization licensed by the State of North Carolina before I turned that responsibility over to a social worker after 6 months. I started working with my church full time. I've been working with the church ever since but will retire I December 2004.